



The Lewis Carroll Writing Competition 2021

The Unseen Jubjub Bird

By Niamh Whelan (Under 20s Competition)

This chapter comes after Chapter 6, "Humpty Dumpty" in "Alice Through the Looking-Glass".

Upon hearing the crash, Alice turned around to see that Humpty Dumpty's face had fallen. Never before had Alice witnessed such a fall, the face of Humpty Dumpty lying wretchedly on the ground. Due to having very little experience with situations of this kind, Alice slowly approached the blank figure of which she could not help considering to be an object of utmost peculiarity.

"You're faceless." she remarked, not knowing how else to begin. Shortly afterwards, she heard a voice. The voice did not come from what remained of Humpty Dumpty upon the wall, it came from the oval-shaped puddle near her feet, the puddle bearing his miserable countenance.

"Faceless, bodiless- neither of which am I!" argued the voice of Humpty Dumpty. "Do not describe the absence of what is undeniably present. You have already mentioned being able to see me sing; eyes as sharp as yours should easily discern that both my face and body remain."

"Yet your face is without a body."

"Balderdash! If my body had disappeared you would be on the verge of concocting some sense. However, my body remains. Nothing cannot remain. Nothing cannot do. My body does remain- therefore it still exists. Since my body exists and continues to be under my ownership, my face is not without it."

Alice, almightily confused, replied "Then why can nothing not when nothing cannot do?"

"Because nothing cannot be able to, so nothing cannot can."

Alice felt that nothing good was coming out of this tiresome subject. She concluded to return to the roots of the conversation. She knelt down beside the puddle, looked down at the face of Humpty Dumpty and asked, "So why did your face fall?"

Not meeting Alice's gaze, the face of Humpty Dumpty responded, "A shrill and high scream- a scream that would cause many a face to fall." This only added to her perplexity. She thought that shrill and sharp screams only came from small creatures such as mice- why would Humpty Dumpty be scared of mice if he could summon all the King's horses and men?

“You do not like mice? I wish Dinah were here, she could have helped you to chase them away.” She began to remember the Caucus-race and regretted having mentioned Dinah. She did not want to upset the already irritable Humpty Dumpty.

“As a matter of fact, I quite like *mouse* and am consequently content in knowing that your Dinah is not here. If she is anything like yourself, then I am doubly glad.”

Though fed up with Humpty Dumpty’s tedious insults, Alice had many questions to ask and thus pursued. “Why mouse and not mice?”

Humpty Dumpty frowned. “I am going to have to pay many wages this Saturday night for all the words I have used in answering your questions. Perhaps I should ration you to five.”

Alice, not delighted by this proposal, repeated “Why mouse and not mice?” She then stretched out her thumb to take record of the questions she had left.

“I am partial to more than one mice of course! Is it not obvious?” exclaimed the irascible Humpty Dumpty.

Attempting to be tactful in extracting information from Humpty Dumpty, her questions being rationed, Alice replied “I thought that mice meant more than one mouse.”

“I have never heard of such a thing. Whatever ingredients are used in the making of sense, your statement certainly is not one of them. Why else do you think that the noun ‘mouse’ includes the object ‘us’ whilst mice contains the subject ‘I’? It could not be made more apparent. ‘Us’ is plural and ‘I’ is singular. Hence, mouse is many and mice is one.”

As a result of her confusion, dissatisfaction and unwillingness to sacrifice another question over the mouse affair, Alice turned her reflections to the scream that caused Humpty Dumpty’s face to fall. She stretched out her index finger and asked, “If the scream is not that of *mouse*, from where did it really come?”

For the first time, Humpty Dumpty’s lips began to tremble and he replied, “Hitherto I have been confounded by your ignorance, but now I regard it with envy as you have not been acquainted with the Jubjub bird.”

“I’m not ignorant,” remarked Alice, “Nobody has ever told me...”

“Well of course, for nobody cannot do and nobody cannot tell.”

Displeased by the interruption, Alice proceeded, “I have never been told about the existence of a Jubjub bird. Must one beware of it?” Only as she ended the question did Alice have a notion of familiarity surrounding the Jubjub bird. She felt that she had in fact heard of it before, however she was not entirely certain. The long conversation with Humpty Dumpty was likely to have induced this impression, her bewilderment from the discussion perhaps interfering with the exactness of her recollection.

“Indeed, the Jubjub bird is something to beware,” replied the solemn voice of Humpty Dumpty, “its want of temper and perpetual passion make it a creature feared by many.” Without giving any more details upon the nature of the Jubjub bird, Humpty Dumpty took a grave sigh and focused on the clouds above.

Alice, wishing that she had spent her third question on obtaining a more prolific answer, extended her next finger and reflected, "I suppose the Jubjub bird must be very small to sound a high-pitched scream." Trying to avoid the use of another question, she added "I do hope it is not as dangerous as you imagine."

"Your supposition is incorrect." Humpty Dumpty retorted, still refusing to give her the honour of a single glance. "The Jubjub bird is extremely large; it is almost half the size of the Jabberwock, so is indisputably colossal. Its dangerousness can only be known- few could choose to conceive it."

This description failed to deter the curiosity of Alice, who was becoming more inclined to dismiss Humpty Dumpty's disagreeable apprehensions, many of his previous thoughts having already been established as contrary to her own. She wanted to find out more about the Jubjub bird and so began as follows- "I do wonder if Jubjub could mean large and invisible for although you have heard it, neither of us have seen it."

"Ludicrous, how completely ludicrous! An invisible Jubjub bird and your failure at etymology are harsh a means of infliction upon the words you have so inconsiderately used, you must owe them a great deal of recompense."

Alice listened in despair. Each time Humpty Dumpty spoke, she discovered the vastness of what she did not know as opposed to acquiring further knowledge. I do believe, she thought to herself, that I will know less by the end of this conversation than I did at the beginning of it.

A brief silence ensued. Alice could not decide how to address Humpty Dumpty in response to his latter remark. She felt that whatever she asked him would cause her more puzzlement. As a result, she simply concluded to pursue with her enquiry over the Jubjub bird.

"I do not know what you mean by etymology," she began, "but I do know that it is unusual to hear a very large creature without being able to see it. Why can we not see the Jubjub bird?" She lifted up her ring finger, discerning that she was approaching her final question.

"Before we can continue," started the reddening face of Humpty Dumpty, "I must inform you that etymology is the fabric of meaning altogether and to lack understanding in the meaning of the fabric of meaning makes one rather meaningless."

"But what does etymology have to do with the Jubjub bird?" inquired Alice, involuntarily using the last of her five questions. Her frustration was growing with the limited progression of their discussion.

After making an odd noise that sounded like something between a groan and snicker, Humpty Dumpty delivered his reply. "Much," he declared in a tone of blunt severity, "for the name Jubjub bird, resultant from etymology, is indicative of its past. I, for one, perceive the name to be very clear. It tells of how the Jubjub bird was involved in the hunting of the Snark."

"The Hunting of the Snark!" exclaimed Alice, finally drawing the attention of Humpty Dumpty's gaze. "I *have* read about the Jubjub bird before! However, it was quite a long time

ago and I have only ever read of it within very difficult poetry. To be sure, I have even read about it in 'Jabberwocky', the poem we were discussing earlier."

"Both poems are highly important historical accounts," said Humpty Dumpty with an air of loftiness, an air somewhat bizarre for one whose face could not have been closer to the ground, "and if you had had the ability to understand such poetry, you would have saved me great pains in depicting the Jubjub bird."

Not taking much notice of this comment, Alice *again* asked what etymology had to do with the Jubjub bird. "I would also like to know how they relate to 'The Hunting of the Snark'," she indicated, longing to find out why the Jubjub bird had appeared in the rather mysterious poems.

"As they were hunting for the Snark," Humpty Dumpty explained, "the Butcher and the Beaver had several arguments. The Jubjub bird came and its arrival imbued them with such terror that for once they were united, the unison founded upon fear of the Jubjub bird. They agreed to no longer argue and their friendship was cemented for ever."

Alice waited in the expectation of an elucidation. Unfortunately, this explanation did not come so she sighed. Then she had an idea. "You have not answered my fourth question," she said, addressing Humpty Dumpty with a very polite smile, "would it be possible for me to exchange it for another one?"

"Which question would you like to exchange it for?" he asked. "If it is for the one you have just put to me, you are proposing a most unluccrative exchange." Alice suddenly reddened.

"I do not like being rationed to five questions," she said, "I thought that words were for sharing." She was finding Humpty Dumpty increasingly unpleasant; he seemed to be spinning his words into a web of perplexity rather than helping her to learn more about the Jubjub bird.

"That is all very well," Humpty Dumpty declared, "yet you have not been rationed to five questions."

Alice, her conversation with Humpty Dumpty not being much different to a game of tennis, returned, "But you told me that I was rationed to five."

"If you had listened carefully, you would recall that my suggestion was preceded by the adverb 'perhaps'. Hence the proposal was indeterminate."

Relieved by Humpty Dumpty's response, Alice decided to ask him how the relationship between the Butcher and the Beaver led to the naming of the Jubjub bird.

Humpty Dumpty, looking thoughtful, replied, "Since the Butcher and the Beaver concluded not to argue, they no longer took each other to court. This caused the Barrister to lose out on a great many hearings so, during the *times* of the Butcher and the Beaver, the wages of the judge and the juror were reduced by 60%." As he said this, he remains upon the wall procured a memorandum-book from one of his pockets and wrote down a calculation, showing it to Alice:

Let b be the times of the Butcher and the Beaver.

(0.4*judge)=ju

(ju)*b=jub

(0.4*juror)=ju

(ju)*b=jub

Jub+jub=Jubjub

“And that was how they named the Jubjub bird!” Humpty Dumpty exclaimed.

Unsatisfied by the explanation but considering it too complicated to challenge, Alice chose to return to a former question which had not yet been answered: “Why can we not see the Jubjub bird?”

“Because / refuse to do so!” Humpty Dumpty shouted, entering a fit of passion. His body began to wobble about on the wall, becoming increasingly turbulent, “Enough!” he exclaimed, and with that he fell.

Alice’s thoughts, like the remains of Humpty Dumpty, were left in quite a scramble.
